

BLACK LIVES MATTER CLASS EXPLORES SOCIAL MOVE-

BY KIRA HINTZ
Staff Writer

Sullivan and Wallis accidentally turned in the class proposal after its official deadline, and it had to be put through faculty governance to get approval to become a verified class. A main focus of the class, Becker said, is its emphasis on the dramatic inequality of incarceration rates of African Americans in comparison to white people. Becker said the class is an interrogation that looks directly at why people can live in a society that prides itself on being democratic when the act of policing is not reflective of society as a whole or the norms that people claim to embrace, Becker said. The abusiveness of policing practices, particularly investigatory stops by police on black people, are also regularly discussed. Becker said these subjects are usually then related to how people can organize themselves to help confront those types of injustices.

Trying to gain approval of the class in faculty governance last semester was a challenge, Becker said. A couple of objections were voiced, Becker said, with the biggest pushback being around the question of whether or not it's appropriate for students to teach a class. Becker said most people are supposed to have an advanced degree in a specific field to teach, and faculty governance initially was in contention of deciding if students really have the qualifications to present that education.

Additionally, Becker said another opinion that is often debated is the purpose and value of BLM as a social movement when "All Lives Matter."

"There are very specific reasons why a class like this focuses on black lives," Becker said. "It does not mean that other lives mean less. What it means is that we live in a legal and judicial and policing environment that treats black people, particularly young black men, in a highly discriminatory fashion. So it's confronting that I as an old, white, male professor typically do not face the type of dangers like Michael Brown faced in Ferguson of being shot by a cop. And so to say that 'all lives matter' again, there's two ways that you can parr something like that. If you read literature of how Black Lives Matter started as a concept — it did start with the concept of 'All Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter, too.' And that is the ideological base of it. It's like young, black men are humans, are part of our shared reality and their lives are important as well. [To counter] 'Black Lives Matter' with [the phrase] 'All Lives Matter' [is] a frankly racist statement that diminishes the importance of black lives."

Becker said the class was eventually approved with only one vote of opposition and three abstentions.

The reason for wanting to introduce the class, Becker said, is because its content is such a contentious issue. Becker said after the election of President Donald Trump there might be more pressing issues in America right now, but before the election BLM was one of the primary political topics in the United States, which is a reason the class was approved. In the discussions in faculty governance, Becker said many of his colleagues vocally embraced the class because BLM is such an integral and ongoing issue in society right now. Becker said Truman, as a public university, needs to engage in issues like BLM and continue to engage in other subjects like it.

Becker said the class is progressing well and there have already been some serious and in-depth discussions. In regard to this, the most important quality the class provides, Becker said, is an environment where students can have honest conversations about race, racism, oppression and social movements. Becker said that this doesn't necessarily make the class fun because BLM is a serious topic, but the class can be challenging and rewarding for students.

Becker said there are benefits teaching a student-run program can bring to the classroom, unlike the common professor.

"It's designed more like a seminar where you have people reading the same material and then discussing it," Becker said. "Trista, Will and Ben — the preceptors for the class — they thought a lot about these issues and are particularly well-qualified to conceptualize the issues and put the readings together [and] to lead the class discussions. And the class attracted a good group of people who have also thought deeply about these issues and wanted to keep thinking about these issues. So for this type of course I have no problem with having students lead it because they have important insights and are willing to share and discuss those, and so it ends up being a very useful experience."

Becker said support for the class was mostly positive, and he's proud of the official support he gained through his colleagues, despite being disappointed by some of the obstacles the class had to face in faculty governance.

Another adult adviser of the class is Carol Bennett, Assistant Dean of Multicultural Affairs. In addition to having degrees in African studies and African American history, Bennett said she's also interested in what's currently going on with the world. Bennett said she chose to support the class because she thought it would be a good way to bridge the historical past to the historical present. See CLASS, page 7

"Understanding the Black Lives Matter Movement" is a new two-credit, student-led interdisciplinary studies course available this semester that discusses and analyzes the Black Lives Matter movement.

History professor Marc Becker said junior Will Chaney, senior Trista Sullivan and junior Ben Wallis proposed the idea for the class. Becker said he agreed to become an adviser for the class despite not getting paid for his position because he admires Chaney, Sullivan and Wallis and likes having the opportunity to work closely with the three of them on an issue that's important to all of them. The structure of the class, Becker said, is modeled on the syllabus of Frank Leon Roberts, a New York University professor who originally designed the class. Becker said Chaney, Sullivan and Wallis took the syllabus and modified parts of it so it could better fit being taught at Truman State University.

The proposal for the class, Becker said, was done at the last minute. Becker said he, Chaney,